

# Carbon Monoxide: A Duty-Related Danger

Below freezing temperatures now occurring at many locations throughout the United States potentially increase the risk for carbon monoxide (CO) exposures according to officials at the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC). When examining the CDC web site, the [Emergency Management and Response—Information Sharing and Analysis Center](#) (EMR-ISAC) observed: “As some people try to use alternative sources for heat, the possibility for injury or death greatly increases because CO is a colorless, odorless toxic gas.” It is produced when any fuel such as natural gas, propane, gasoline, kerosene, wood, or charcoal is burned.

Water heaters, stoves, ovens, kerosene heaters, grills, wood and gas fireplaces, portable generators, and automobile engines are the primary sources of CO, which are occasionally the main causes of fires. Firefighters responding to these fires should understand that CO poisoning is a danger at every fire regardless of the cause of a fire. “Its symptoms—headache, dizziness, fatigue—are often absent or non-specific, making on-scene awareness and detection difficult.” This puts firefighters at significant risk because even mild CO poisoning can deny the brain of oxygen. It can also rob the heart of oxygen, causing immediate life-threatening complications.

The EMR-ISAC confirmed that firefighters wearing a poor-fitting self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) or working in fire zones without an SCBA sharply raise their chances of CO exposure. CDC experts maintain that this reality makes firefighter awareness a critical necessity. ***Therefore, see more information on this matter at the [CDC Fact Sheet](#) and at [CO Poison Prevention and Alarm Responses](#).***